

## FORWARD IN FAITH; RICHBOROUGH FAMILY REPORT 2019.

St Michael and All Angels', Maidstone, is a parish within the diocese of Canterbury, affiliated through Forward in Faith to The Society of St Wilfrid and St Hilda, and under the episcopal care of the Bishop of Richborough. Our Resolution to request alternative episcopal oversight dates from 2015, when the present system came into force, but our actual arrangement for alternative oversight, which affirms our distinctive character as a traditional Anglo-Catholic church, dates from the time when the Church of England first began to ordain women to the priesthood in 1994.

While it is easy (and all too common) to caricature the position of traditional Catholics as “against women”, what we must emphasise is what we are *for*: a commitment to the classic position of the Church of England, with a continuity of sacramental life that leaves no room for doubt. Some of the recent controversies in the Church of England – relating, for example, to the seal of the confessional and to the nature of marriage – make it clear that traditional Catholics will need to make their voice heard in the continuing discussions, and Forward in Faith is the organisation that can ensure that this will happen.

The Rt Revd Norman Banks, Bishop of Richborough, is our Provincial Episcopal Visitor (the three PEVs are sometimes jokingly known as “flying bishops”). In Holy Week 2019 a record number of people from St Michael and All Angels' attended the Chrism Mass celebrated by Bishop Norman in Canterbury Cathedral – an occasion when we receive our holy oils and also affirm our communion with him and with the clergy and people of other parishes within the “Richborough family”, which covers an area including the eastern dioceses of Canterbury, Chelmsford, Ely, Guildford, St Edmundsbury & Ipswich, Leicester, Lincoln, Norwich, Peterborough, Portsmouth, Rochester, St Albans, Winchester and Gibraltar in Europe. This occasion, in addition to some other arrangements on the ground, is organised by the Diocesan Forward in Faith Committee (Clergy Chairman Fr Peter Harnden, Rector of Harbledown; Lay Chairman Dr David Wilson FZS, of St Peter's, Folkestone), on which all Resolution parishes are represented, and on which Mike Trout and I serve as lay representatives for St Michael's. Fr Harnden is Bishop Norman's representative in our diocese and, during 2019 as previously, we have had cause to appreciate his efforts to build up the family and keep our lines of communication open.

We joined our fellow Richborough parishes not only for the Chrism Mass but also on other significant occasions during 2019. We had the joy of seeing new parish priests appointed to St Peter's, Folkestone (Fr Mark Haldon-Jones) and Holy Trinity, Ramsgate (Fr Paul Blanch), and parties from St Michael and All Angels' attended both institution services. We were well represented, as usual, at the Blessing of the Fisheries at Folkestone in June, and smaller groups from our church enjoyed Bishop Norman's hospitality at a Family Day in St Albans in August and also joined in an inter-diocesan Holy Cross Day celebration at Rochester Cathedral in September.

While we are unable to accept the sacramental ministry of the new Bishop of Dover, we of course recognise her as the lawful holder of her office, and a group from St Michael's made a point of being present for her installation at Canterbury Cathedral.

The paid-up membership of Forward in Faith at St Michael and All Angels' stood in 2019 at about half a dozen. There is a noticeable tendency, in parishes up and down the country, for membership to go quiet until an interregnum looms, and then to rise as people get a sense of urgency. But remember: when the interregnum arises it is likely to be already too late to safeguard the future of a traditional parish unless its members have, in sufficient numbers, made their convictions clear well before that happens. The time to have a sense of urgency is NOW. And paid-up members automatically receive the excellent quality magazine “New Directions”, which is sufficiently attractive and informative to be worth the subscription in itself. You will find a membership table as you go in for the 2020 Chrism Mass – or visit the FiF website to find a membership form.

Eleanor Relle  
Diocesan Committee Member, Forward in Faith.